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**Examining the Relationship between Differentiation of Self Components and Social Adjustment**

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**Abstract**

This study has investigated the relationship between individual differentiations of self and the rate of their social adjustment. Participants in this study were 60 undergraduate students of MA and MBA, faculty of Psychology. These students were selected using random method and they answered two questionnaires of differentiation of self from Skowron and Smith (DSI-R), and the Bell Adjustment Inventory. The analysis of this research was performed by using Pearson correlation and regression analysis, and finally we got the following result of the the main hypothesis:

- A significant relationship between differentiation of self and social adjustment was confirmed. That means the higher the measure of a person differentiation, the higher the measure of adjustment will be and vice versa.

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**Keywords:** differentiation of self; social adjustment.

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**Introduction**

A theory by Murray Bowen (1913-1990) recognizes family's system as an emotional unit as well as a network of intertwined connections. The basis of his precise theory consists of forces that belong within a family and seek either unity or individuality. According to Bowen, the level of manifested self-differentiation of self in each individual indicates their ability to differentiate a rational process from an emotional one that they experience (Goldenberg 2007).

Family members develop their individual identities throughout the process of growing up, yet still feel a sense of belonging toward their family group; therefore, they will continue to maintain their own group image. There members do not live in solitude, but dependently on one another. To achieve successful functioning, they need to adjust to the varied needs of other family members, larger relative networks, neighborhood, and finally the society. In addition to their own survival as a system, families that function healthily cause flourishing of potentials in their every single family member. That is to say, they allow them to start exploring and self-discovery with confidence and assurance (Goldenberg, 2007).

Evidence shows that a human being must learn to adjust to the society as a social entity. This adjustment is founded within family through individual growth and development. According to the theory by Bowen, more differentiated people are likely to show more psychological adjustment. Whereas less differentiated people show less competence under stressful circumstances, and therefore suffer more physical and psychological disorders such as anxiety, somatization, depression, alcoholism, and psychotic disorder

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(Bowen, 1976-1978; Kerr and Bowen, 1988; Skowron, E. A., & Friedlander, M. L. 1998; Titelman, P. (Ed.). 1998; Quoting P. Shakibayi, 2006)

According to Bowen, the level of manifested differentiation of self in each individual indicates their ability to differentiate a rational process from an emotional one that they experience (Goldenberg 2007).

In 1990, Bowen believed that emotional turmoil in every individual is a source of emotional connection with others and continues to exist through these very connections. People have complex and impartible bonds in terms of thinking, feeling, and behaving within family systems, rather than an autonomic mental essence. Consequent to reduction of autonomy, one is chronically anxious which stands as the basis for all pathological symptoms and whose only antidote is to reach differentiation of self and separation. That is a process through which one learns to portray their own path rather than follow in family members' and others' footsteps (Goldenberg, 2007).

The present study has tried to answer the question of whether or not components of differentiation of self can be involved in a person's social adjustment.

We may be able to take a step toward increasing social adjustment in small and large scales, from family to society, by making use of the present study's results.

## Study Method

The statistical population of this study consists of 60 university students of ages 18-30 who were studying for bachelor and master degree in 2010. They were chosen through random sampling.

The data is collected through two questionnaires presented within 20 consecutive days.

The method of the study is correlative and descriptive, and navigational approach (survey) is used to collect the data. In this method, those situations and states are studied that respond to the present time. The descriptive method is used, since the way these features are distributed among the sample volume is studied here. In this part, the data has been classified and described using descriptive indicators, and then the variables were studied using tables and graphs. The Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression were used to analyze and extract the results to analyze the hypotheses.

## Tools:

1. The differentiation of self inventory which is a self-reporting tool and is used to evaluate self-differentiation, mainly focusing on the important connections of life and people's relationships with main families (Skowron, 2003). This inventory (DSI; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003) is a 46-item self-report inventory used in the study to measure coping and psychological health. The DSI was designed to capture Bowen's (1978) construct of differentiation of self. Participants responded using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 6 (very true of me). The inventory was edited in 1998 by Skowron and Friedlander in three stages of studies, and was revised in 2003 by Skowron and Smith. This scale includes four subscales of Emotional Reactivity (CER), I Position (IP), Emotional Cutoff (CEC), and Fusion with Others (FO). Skowron and Schmitt (2003) have reported internal consistency among the DSI scores ranging from 0.81 to 0.92. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were very good in Hooper and K. Doehler (2011) study, ranging IURP WR 0.71 to 0.85 .

Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was reported 0.88 by skowron and Friedlander. This very alpha coefficient was reported 0.84 by Peleg-Popko in (2004).

Reliability of sub-inventories was calculated by Cronbach Alpha Coefficient to be: ER=0/8, IP=0/8, EC=0/8, FO=0/74 (Peleg-Popko, O. (2002).

2. Bell Adjustment Inventory (sub-inventory of social adjustment): this inventory consists of 160 questions (Bell 1961) and evaluates adjustment in 5 categories (family, physical health, emotional, occupation, and social). However, only the sub-inventory of social adjustment was used in the present study. This inventory was normalized by Margaret Simoline in Iran in 1987 and can be used for teenagers and adults. It can be conducted in groups and has no time limits.

### Data Analysis

The data must be described before being classified and categorized.

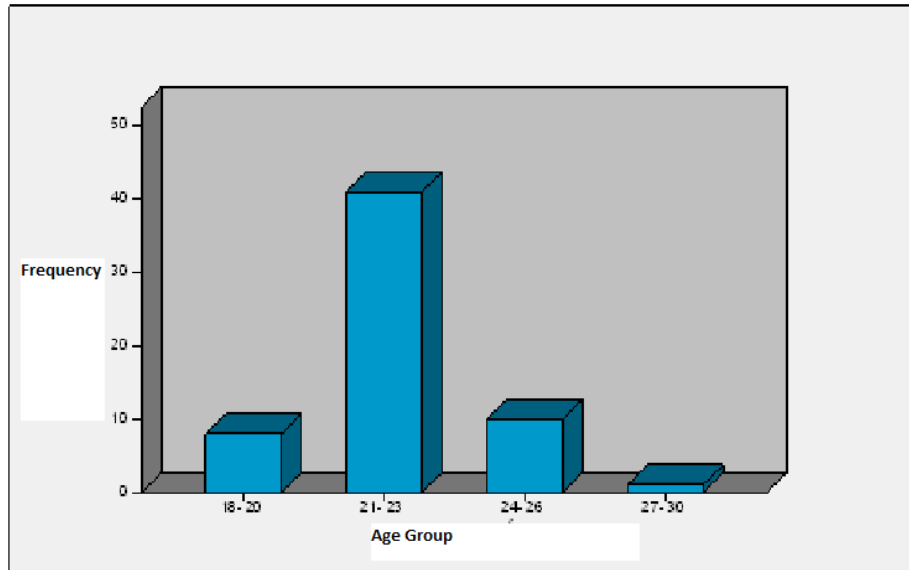
Demographic characteristics of the study sample:

**Table 1.** Distribution Frequency and Percentage of Statistical Population divided by Age Group

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18 to 20	8	13.3
21 to 23	41	68.3
24 to 26	10	16.7
27 to 30	1	1.7
Total	60	100

According to the table above, %68.3 of the population were 21 to 23 years old, and the smallest frequency belonged to the group of 27 to 30 years old (percentage: 1.7).

**Graph 1.** A bar graph of the distribution of the sample according to age group



### **Deductive Findings**

Presenting the study findings according to the study hypotheses:

The data from inventories and questionnaires is analyzed using deductive statistics, and each hypothesis is examined after redesigning the hypotheses based on the results from the analysis.

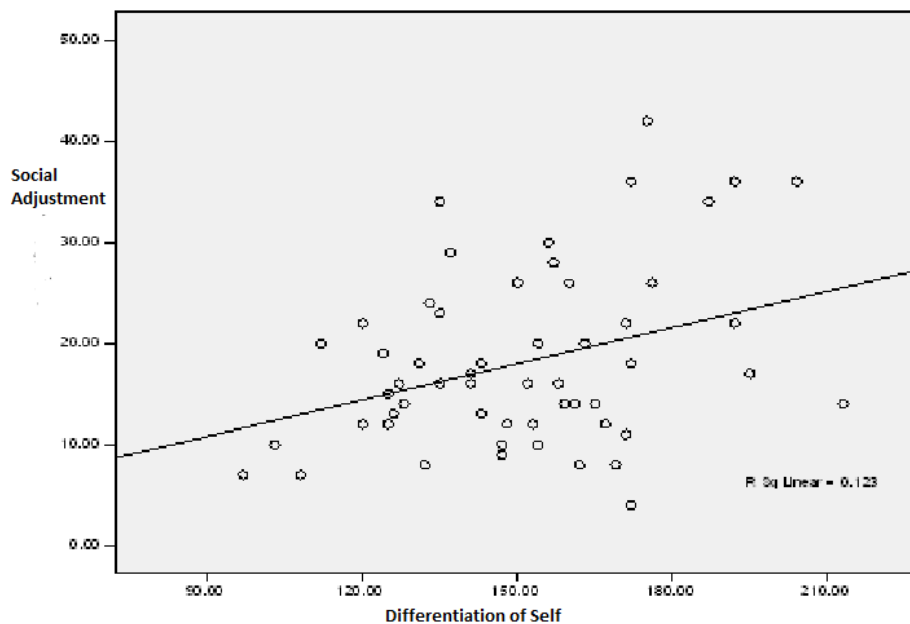
Main Hypothesis: There is a connection between differentiation of self and social adjustment in an individual

Since we want to examine the connection between two variables of differentiation of self and social adjustment, we use Pearson Correlation Coefficient to study the hypothesis.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Score of Differentiation of Self and Social Adjustment

Indicator	Number	Smallest Amount	Largest Amount	Average	Standard Deviation	Variance
<b>Variable</b>						
Differentiation of Self	60	97	213	150.83	24.68	609.26
Social Adjustment	60	4	42	18.08	8.43	70.99

As is clear in table 2, the average score of differentiation of self is 150.83 and the average score of social adjustment is 18.08. We will study the significance of this connection below.

**Graph 2.** Scatter plot of the relationship between two variables of differentiation of self and social adjustment

**Table 3.** Results of correlation coefficient between variables of differentiation of self and social adjustment

Statistical Indicator	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	Significance Level
Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	P
Differentiation of Self and Social Adjustment	0.351	0.123	0.006

As the findings of table 3 and graph 2 show, the significance level (0.006) is less than the standard significance level (0.01). Therefore, there is a significant connection between differentiation of self and social adjustment, and the correlation amount (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) is  $R_{xy}=0.351$ . The independent variable (differentiation of self) justifies %12.30 of social adjustment changes. Thus, the study hypothesis indicating a connection between differentiation of self and social adjustment is confirmed with %99 of certainty and the null hypothesis is rejected. Moreover, the positive relation between the two variables shows that the higher the level of self-differentiation in an individual, the higher their social adjustment level will be, and vice versa. In other sense, the connection between these two variables is a direct and positive one.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings within the present study, and to answer the main hypothesis, there is a connection between an individual's differentiation of self and their social adjustment. There is a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (social adjustment), and the correlation score is  $R_{xy}=0.351$ .

Thus, the study hypothesis indicating a connection between differentiation of self and social adjustment is confirmed with %99 of certainty and the null hypothesis is rejected. Moreover, the positive relation between the two variables shows that the higher the level of self-differentiation in an individual, the higher their social adjustment level will be, and vice versa.

Various studies have been conducted on this subject with variables of social adjustment and self-differentiation including a study by Soltani in 2008, which examined the effects of communicative skills on differentiation of self among adolescents. The results to that study are noteworthy, and the effects of communicative skills on self-differentiation have been confirmed, which is fairly consistent with the results of the present study.

Another study on the effects of training individuals with differentiation of self and reduction of conjugal conflicts indicates that these trainings enhance collaboration between couples, sexual relationships, and relationships with relatives or friends of spouse, and reduce emotional reaction, need to be supported by children, and separated financial matters. All of the mentioned result in more adjustment between couples and their children.

The study by Chung, H. J., & Gale, J. (2006) examined the connection between differentiation of self and attempts to win control. The results showed that differentiation of self uniquely predicts attempts to win control, and there was a significant connection between differentiation of self and attachment. Since more attachment leads to mutual understanding and further possibilities of entering social groups in a way, the results of the study were consistent with those of the present study as well.

In a study by Murdock & Gore in 2004 on 119 university students, the effects of differentiation of self on stress in psychological functions were studied, and the results showed that people with less self-differentiation are more vulnerable against physical and mental disorders. Since stress is effective on social interactions of an individual, they can also alter one's social adjustment, which is also consistent with our study.

Based on the results of the study that show effectiveness of self-differentiation on social adjustment, it is recommended that factors of self-differentiation be taught among various age groups. Schools, kindergartens, mosques, and universities are among the main educational locations to this goal.

Limitations such as reduction of samples throughout the study process, effects of intervening variables that lead to mistakes or confusions in the researcher, it is recommended that this study be conducted with more sample units in more extended ways to increase its external validity.

We certainly hope that this study is a starting point for further comprehensive studies on this subject in the future.

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